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# SNAKES AND LADDERS: THE COMBINED EFFECT OF QUALIFICATIONS AND MARRIAGE ON THE EMPLOYMENT TRAJECTORIES OF PERUVIAN GRADUATES IN SWITZERLAND

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## Abstract

Research on the risks of under- or unemployment faced by highly qualified non-EU immigrants to Switzerland has focused on the absence of recognition of their foreign qualifications as a major source of vulnerability in the host country. The aim of this paper is to study the employment trajectories of a specific group of migrants who have graduated from a Swiss higher education (HE) institution. Drawing on a life-course perspective, the paper is based on sixteen biographical interviews with a diverse group of highly skilled Peruvian men and women living in Switzerland, after having graduated from a Swiss HE institution. We identify three ideal-type trajectories of migrant graduates with a Swiss HE qualification, based on their field of study, their route of access to formal residential status (essential employment clause / bi-national marriage) and the domestic division of labor and care responsibilities within their households. We show that obtaining a Swiss HE qualification is rarely enough to guarantee non-European graduates access to a stable job that is commensurate to their qualifications., The ability of these Swiss-trained migrants to translate their educational credentials into favorable professional outcomes is highly dependent on family formation patterns and gender arrangements. Some routes to formal residential rights in Switzerland after graduation would seem to cancel out the advantages associated with having a Swiss qualification and lead to long-term precarious employment experiences, especially for female graduates from the humanities and social sciences who receive residential qualifications through marriage to a Swiss or EU national, rather than on the basis of their own contribution to the Swiss labor market.

## Keywords

Highly skilled migration | international student migration | employment transitions | bi-national marriages | Switzerland

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## 1. Introduction

Much research to date has shown that qualified people who migrate from the global South to the wealthier nations of the North often experience a devaluation of their educational achievements, notably because their initial qualifications are not recognised in the host countries. The national validity of educational credentials is often identified as the main cause of the relatively unfavourable labour market outcomes of highly skilled migrants, who tend to be concentrated in the least prestigious employment sectors and to bear an unequal share of precarious and demanding jobs (Iredale, 2005). Thus, existing studies of the labour market participation of highly skilled non-EU citizens in Switzerland (Riaño et al, 2015; Riaño, 2011; Pecoraro, 2010; Riaño & Baghdadi, 2007) have tended to stress the multiple barriers these qualified workers face in finding jobs that are commensurate with their skills.

In this article, we propose to analyse the employment outcomes of highly qualified non-European Union (EU) citizens<sup>1</sup> to Switzerland from a slightly different angle. We will focus solely on men and women from a single South American country (Peru) who have received at least one tertiary education diploma from a Swiss university (or equivalent), and who were living in Switzerland at the time of the study. Although previous research has stressed the difficulties faced by non-EU students in Swiss HE institutions, both in terms of successfully completing their educational programme and in finding qualified jobs afterwards (Guissé and Bolzman, 2015), the aim of the article is to show the diversity of professional and family outcomes that are associated with foreigner's access to the Swiss higher education system. We will show that obtaining a Swiss HE qualification is rarely enough to guarantee access to the upper reaches of the Swiss labour market. In most cases, domestic qualifications need to be combined with marriage to a Swiss (or EU) citizen before these highly qualified migrants are able to find a job that is congruent to their educational credentials and to settle legally in the host country. However, the family reunification route into legal residency is not without its own hazards. For women in particular, it may cancel out some of the advantages associated with having a Swiss qualification and lead to precarious or under-qualified positions on the labour market.

Thus, whilst investigating under what circumstances partnership and parenthood influence the educational and employment trajectories of Peruvian migrants, we are also interested in exploring the ways in which access to Swiss higher education (HE) institutions and qualifications in turn influences the family-formation patterns and gender arrangements within foreign and bi-national households. We will show that holding a Swiss HE qualification does not lead to identical labour market outcomes for all the Peruvian migrants we met. Not only are their employment opportunities influenced by the gendered choice of study (engineering versus the social science and humanities - SSH), they also depend to a large extent on the gendered division of care and domestic labour that is adopted within households. Overall, it appears that the gender configurations in the family sphere have as much influence on the employment opportunities of these highly qualified migrants than the level or origin of their educational credentials *per se*.

The article is structured around five main sections. After briefly presenting the international student mobility from non-EU countries to Switzerland and explaining the focus on Peruvian graduates (2), we then go on to review the internationalisation of family-formation patterns, notably bi-national marriage (3). After presenting the qualitative research methods used here (4), we then go on to present three ideal-type transition patterns out of HE institutions into the Swiss labour market for Peruvian graduates (5).

## **2. International Student mobility from non-EU countries to Switzerland: the case of Peruvian graduates**

In 2015-2016, 24.9% of Swiss higher education (HE) students were “foreigners”<sup>2</sup>, in the sense that they had obtained their secondary school-leaving diploma outside of Switzerland, as compared to just 13.1% of students in 1990-1991 (FSO, 2017b). The proportion of foreign students increases according to level of study: In 2010-2011, foreigners represent 22% of students at Bachelor level as compared to 52.1% of PhD students (Kunz, 2011, p. 7). It also varies by the type of HE institution, with the share of foreign students being lower in universities of applied sciences (12.5%) and on teacher training courses (5%) than in universities (FSO, 2017b). With the exclusion of PhDs, most foreign students (74%) at Bachelor and Master levels come from neighbouring countries and other EU member states, while 4% come from Central and South America (CSA) (Fischer & Gerhard Ortega, 2015, p. 11). Although CSA students in Switzerland represent a minority, we would argue that their

experiences challenge widely accepted ideas about international student mobility. So-called “brain drain” or “brain gain” are far from simple processes and the “race for talent” between developed nations in the global North is not enough to guarantee a straightforward transition to domestic labour markets for newly graduated foreigners.

Establishing the importance and evolution of international student migration to Switzerland is no easy task, since the category “foreign students” includes people with very different backgrounds and life histories (Teichler, 2015). In Switzerland, the literature has been particularly interested in the educational accomplishments of second-generation immigrants from European countries (Fibbi, Kaya, & Piguet, 2003; Griga, 2014), i.e. in non-mobile foreign students who have already lived and studied in their host/home country, rather than in non-EU foreigners who have moved to Switzerland in order to study. The latter have to follow a long and often complex route into the country, via direct and selective admission procedures to a HE institution. Focus on Peruvian graduates improves understanding about a feminized group of non-EU citizens from sufficiently favourable backgrounds to enable enrolment and completion of university programs in Switzerland, but who nevertheless face legal barriers to settlement and highly gendered outcomes in their transition to the labour market.

Applications to particular Swiss HE institutions are generally made from their home countries (Guissé & Bolzman, 2015) and need to be accompanied by certified translations or their previous diplomas and grade certificates into one of the official Swiss languages. Each HE institution is entitled to make its own decision concerning the entry regulations to particular courses and is free to recognise (or not) qualifications obtained abroad<sup>3</sup>. Once they have obtained a place at a HE institution, non-EU citizens also have to apply for a student visa. This involves providing the Swiss Embassy in their home country with a number of formal documents, including: a letter of acceptance to the study program, proof of economic solvency (the deposit of approx. 24,000 CHF in a bank account) and/or a letter of sponsorship from a Swiss citizen. This process is both costly and time-consuming<sup>4</sup>. The Federal government also runs its own highly selective student mobility programmes, which provide a limited number of studentships to applicants from non-EU countries. It provides a monthly stipend of 2000 CHF for a period of 3 years to a small number of “promising” PhD candidates from Asia, Africa or Latin America. Foreign students who pass through this

selective route into the Swiss HE system are usually helped with the visa application process and are sometimes provided with subsidised student accommodation for the duration of their studies.

The focus on Peruvians graduates, a minority but selective group of migrants, is well suited to the study of the transnational education to employment transitions. Compared to other Latin American migrants, to the USA, for example (Takenaka & Pren, 2010), Peruvian migrants make up a highly educated, highly feminized (Sanchez, 2012, p. 78) and highly urbanised migrant group: 29% have a tertiary level of education (Paerregaard, 2015) and 57.7% come from the capital, Lima (Sanchez, 2012, p. 86). Likewise, in Switzerland, women represent 64% of Peruvian migrants and 58% of them had post-compulsory education (22% with upper secondary degrees and 36% with tertiary degrees) (Service d'informations du relevé structurel, 2015).

The Swiss migration regime is generally recognised as being one of the most restrictive in Europe, but it is important to study in detail the complex ways in which individuals combine the opportunities associated with educational migration, so-called economic migration and family reunification measures. Although non-EU foreign students do have access to student permits, these are only valid for the precise duration of their study programme. Before the 1990s, Peruvian citizens did not need a visa to enter Switzerland. Likewise, before the 2008 Federal Act on Foreign Nationals imposed tighter restrictions on the ability of non-EU citizens to study, work or settle in the country, Peruvians had more opportunities to switch from a tourist visa to a student visa or a work permit. Although Switzerland has not been a common destination for Peruvians, the recent economic crisis in Spain and Italy has led to a diversification of their migrant destinations. In 2015, Peru's National Office of Electoral Processes had 6,482 registered voters in Switzerland, while the Swiss Federal Statistical Office counted only 2,898 Peruvian citizens in 2015<sup>5</sup> (FSO, 2016b).

Up until 2011, non-EU foreign graduates were required to leave the country immediately after graduation. Since that date, partly in response to the recurrent labour shortages identified in particular sectors of the Swiss labour market (ManpowerGroup, 2015), a six month "job search extension" to student permits has been introduced (State Secretariat for Migration, 2011). However, in order to recruit a foreign graduate, employers are required to attest that the person in question is better qualified than any available Swiss or EU citizen

(The Federal Council, 2005), under a so-called “essential employment” clause. Foreign graduates with Swiss qualifications need to find an employer who is willing to “sponsor” their work permit application, by attesting a shortage of equally qualified Swiss or EU candidates in the field.

Several authors have noted that this type of procedure tends to create a “gendered global hierarchy of professions”, which considers male-dominated sectors such as finance and technology to be of “greater national interest for global competitiveness” than female-dominated sectors such as care work and welfare services (Kofman & Raghuram, 2006, pp. 282–303). Peruvian and Swiss HE systems show a similar pattern of gender segregation. In Peruvian universities, 27.8% of male students are concentrated in engineering, whereas 20% of female students are concentrated in education studies (INEI, 2015). In Switzerland, women represent only 29.1% of engineering graduates, whereas they make up 67.5% of social sciences and humanities students (SSH). The part of foreigners is higher in the male-dominated disciplines (42.7% in engineering) than in the female-dominated ones (24.8% in SSH) (FSO, 2017c).

Given the uncertainties surrounding the transition from Swiss HE institutions to the labour market, graduates from non-EU countries who wish to remain in Switzerland are likely to consider “family reunification” measures, which are often seen as more immediately accessible than those involving the “essential employment” clause. Family reunification procedures have frequently been identified as an important route into legal settlement for poorly qualified foreign women, particularly in the care sector (Banfi & Boccagni, 2011; Bonizzoni, 2015). Only recently has the importance of these procedures for the education to employment transition of highly qualified migrants started to be recognised (Fleischer, 2011).

As with the student permit, work and family reunification permits allow conditional residence in Switzerland (permit B) for non-EU citizens. They have to renew their B permit each year by proving the fulfilment of the purpose of stay. However, the number of B permits allocated is subject to quotas<sup>6</sup>. In contrast, the male and female spouses of Swiss citizens can apply for Swiss nationality after five years of marriage, or even after three years if they chose to use the “fast-track” option, subject to proving “successful integration”.

### **3. The internationalisation of family-formation patterns in the Swiss context**

In Switzerland, the percentage of couples composed of people of different nationalities has increased from 20% in the 1970s to 40% in the 2000s (Mosimann, 2016). In 2015, 36% of marriages were composed of a foreign spouse and a Swiss citizen, 59.5% of these marriages involved a foreigner from outside Europe and 62.5% involved a non-EU female partner (FSO, 2017a). In 2014, family reunification permits represent the second largest source of migration flow into Switzerland after the EU free movement agreements (OECD, 2016, p. 307). In 2010, approximately 11% of foreigners married to a Swiss citizen were from South America and Peruvians ranked in 3<sup>rd</sup> place - 70% of these marriages are between a Peruvian woman and a Swiss man (FSO, 2016a). Although the increase in bi-national marriages has undoubtedly contributed to the increase in the immigrant population in Switzerland, little is known about the employment outcomes of these highly skilled migrant spouses.

Once again, the categories used to describe the internationalisation of family formation patterns are often rather fuzzy. The distinctions made between mixed marriages, bi-national marriages, transnational marriages, arranged marriages, sham marriages, etc. are not always clear in practice (Beck-Gernsheim, 2007). Other studies about the migration patterns of non-EU citizens to Switzerland emphasize the differentiation between transnational families due to the increasing fragmentation of the right to family reunification in Europe (Bonizzoni, 2011). In this paper, we use the concept of bi-national marriages as it “best captures the inter-linkage of issues related to the different cultural background of the spouses with issues related to citizenship and residence” (Kraler, Kofman, Kohli, & Schmoll, 2011, pp. 26–27).

When analysing the effects of the Swiss migration regime on the family-formation patterns developed by Peruvian graduates from Swiss HE institutions, it is important to stress the relatively differentiated gender regime that prevails in the Swiss context (Giraud & Lucas, 2009). The scarcity and cost of public childcare services hinders women’s full-time, continuous labour market participation, particularly after the birth of a first child (Giudici & Gauthier, 2009). It has been argued that the access of foreign spouses to settlement rights in Switzerland is conditioned on scrupulous conformity to the dominant “master status” (Krüger & Levy, 2001) of the Swiss gender regime (Levy & Widmer, 2013b; Riaño, 2011; Riaño & Baghdadi, 2007).

#### **4. Making the link between international student mobility, bi-national marriage and labour market participation patterns**

The literature on international student mobility and bi-national marriage is rather ambivalent as to the long-term implications of access to qualifications from host country institutions on the life-course trajectories of highly skilled migrants. However, different types of literature reveal some common features. Studies on international student migration analyse the issues of labour market participation after graduation in the host country (Suter & Jandl, 2008) or the role of spouses during the completion of a study program abroad (Bordoloi, 2015; Schaer, Dahinden, & Toader, 2016). Studies of bi-national marriages emphasize legal-based inequalities within couples composed of EU and non-EU citizens (Fleischer, 2011), as well as skills-based inequalities within couples where non-EU spouses are more highly qualified than their EU partners (Guetto & Azzolini, 2015). A limited number of studies have identified marriage to a national as a prime route for (female) highly skilled foreigners into host country labour markets (Kofman & Raghuram, 2006).

Drawing on a life-course perspective, this article proposes to analyse events that demonstrate the interdependence of educational, professional and family trajectories in the transition of Peruvian graduates to the Swiss labour market. We argue that the ability of migrants with Swiss qualifications to translate their educational credentials into professional capital is highly dependant on the negotiation of each spouse's career opportunities and caregiving responsibilities within their own household and extended family networks (Creese, Dyck, & Tiger Mc Laren, 2011; Phan, Banerjee, Deacon, & Taraky, 2015). Thus, rather than presuming a binary pattern of the higher education to employment transition for migrant men and women in the Swiss context, we propose to focus on the heterogeneity of the experiences of qualified Peruvian migrants, that partly reproduce and partly transcend the gender divide.

#### **5. Research methods**

The data presented here was collected by the first author in the course of her PhD research and are based on 54 biographical interviews carried out – in Spanish - with Peruvian men and women living in the French and German speaking regions of Switzerland. The aim of these interviews, which were carried out using the LIVES life-calendar (Morselli et al, 2013)<sup>7</sup>, was to collect systematic information about the important events in the participant's professional

and family trajectories, as well as their own explanation of their transition to employment patterns.

Table 1. *Interviewee profiles*

		<b>Work</b>				
	<b>Name</b>	<b>Original education</b>	<b>experience before migration</b>	<b>Age at/ year of migration</b>	<b>Migration type</b>	<b>Swiss degree</b>
1	Carlos	Engineer	None	18/1995	Family	Engineer
2	Samuel	Architect	Architect	38/2007	Student	Engineer
3	Betty	Linguistics	Teaching	24/1992	Swiss passport	Linguistics
4	Marco	Environmental	Environmental	25/2011	Student	Engineer
5	Augusto	Engineer	Engineer	26/2011	Student	Engineer
6	Coco	Physics	Research	29/2008	Student	Engineer
7	Paco	Lawyer	Lawyer	28/1990	Student	Bussiness
8	Ernesto	Engineer	Engineer	26/2008	Student	Engineer
9	Marta	Social Worker	Social worker	27/1997	Student	Social worker
10	Concha	Doctor	Doctor	37/2010	Marriage	Medical studies
11	Lola	Secretary	Secretary	26/1990	Student	Sociology
12	Hilda	Translator	None	20/1981	Student	Linguistics
13	Jenny	None	Secretary	29/1990	Student	Sociology
14	Rosa	Journalist	Journalist	28/1990	Student	Sociology
15	Pepe	Anthropology	Anthropology	31/2012	Swiss passport	Anthropology (incompleted)
16	Rocio	Engineer	None	22/1996	No permit	Arts

Contact with interviewees was established through personal networks and migrant associations using a “snowball” technique in order to cover a population that was as diverse as possible, in terms of gender, age, education, employment status, migration history and family-formation patterns. Peruvian nationality was the main selection criterion, and those with dual nationality were included in the study. This article is based on a sub-group of 16 participants (8 women and 8 men) who had studied at a Swiss HE institution<sup>8</sup> and were living in Switzerland at the time of interview<sup>9</sup> (see Table 1 for details).

The data enabled us to adopt a multidimensional approach to biographies, since: “the complete biographical path of an individual is composed of a series of “parallel” trajectories: familial, relational, occupational, residential, etc.” (Levy & Widmer, 2013a, p. 17). In order to represent the various ideal-types of education to employment transition, we have adopted an annotation technique that enables us to compare a corpus of life-stories from people who shared similar circumstances, but without subsuming individual experiences under over-generalised categorisations (Liversage, 2009, p. 207). This type of notation is valuable for depicting “an individual’s movements through time and (stratified) social space” (Liversage, 2009, p. 208).

### **6. Labour market outcomes for Peruvians with Swiss HE qualifications**

The interviews and life-history calendars reveal that access to host country qualifications does not automatically improve the labour market outcomes of the Peruvian immigrants we interviewed. As could be expected, the type of qualification and field of studies appear to play a major role in ensuring not only that Peruvian graduates from a Swiss HE institution find a job, but also that they are employed at a level that is commensurate with their educational credentials. However, perhaps more surprisingly, our interviews indicate the vital importance of family reunification measures in ensuring that Peruvian migrants with Swiss qualifications are able to access the host country labour market. Nevertheless, when the right to work is achieved through marriage to a Swiss or EU national, rather than through “essential employment” criteria, the migrants face a risk of disqualification. They are much less likely to experience direct access to jobs that are commensurate with their educational credentials than their colleagues who benefit from the “essential employment” clause and who are sponsored by prospective employers. We can thus affirm that marriage to a Swiss or EU-national has a potentially variable effect on the employment outcomes of Peruvian graduates from Swiss HE institutions. In some cases, marriage acts as an additional resource, helping graduates get a first foot on the labour market and subsequently helping them to move up the career ladder in their chosen field of employment. In other cases, marriage to a Swiss or EU-national appears to cancel out the advantages of possessing a Swiss degree, sending the respondents down a slippery slope into precarious and part-time jobs, sometimes even full-time domesticity, implying long-term financial dependency on their (Swiss or European) spouse.

Although the study sample is not representative of the Peruvian migrant population as a whole, it is interesting to note that over half of the interviewees (10) were employed in highly skilled, full-time and permanent jobs at the time of the interview. The others had been unsuccessful in finding jobs that were commensurate with their Swiss qualifications and were either working in jobs that were below their skill levels or desired working time (5), or had dedicated themselves to (almost) full-time home-making (1).

In the summary graphs presented below (Figure 1), we outline three distinct ideal-type patterns of the education to employment transition for Peruvian migrants with Swiss tertiary qualifications. The horizontal x-axis depicts both historical time and the number of years since immigration to Switzerland; it thus enables us to contextualise individual trajectories within historical events, such as political violence and the economic crisis that took place in Peru between 1980 and 2000, or the Foreign Nationals Act that was introduced in Switzerland in 2008. The selected interviewees had arrived in Switzerland over a period of almost three decades – from 1980 to 2010. They had also migrated at quite different ages – between 18 and 38 years -, although the majority had arrived in Switzerland between the age of 25 and 30 years. Consequently, intersections between two central temporalities: historical time and lifetime varied across the 16 interviews analysed here.

The vertical y-axis represents respondents' positions and movement through social space. The left-hand side of the graph depicts educational events and professional status. The blue arrow refers to periods of study in Peruvian or Swiss HE institutions, including language courses. Time spent in employment figures at the upper left part of the graph, placing stable, full-time employment commensurate to skills as the most desirable outcome. Other employment outcomes are graded according to the resources they bring to the respondents. The category "involuntary part-time" refers to jobs that are also commensurate with the educational credentials, but that are occupied on a part-time basis (below 50%), usually involuntarily. Finally, the category "low-level employment" refers to jobs that do not require high levels of qualification and that are often precarious and unstable. The category "out of the labour market" refers to those respondents who were not in employment at the time of the interview (including those in voluntary work or full-time home-making), but who were not officially registered as unemployed either. On the right hand side of the graph, the green arrow depicts different family events: partnership, marriage, birth of children and degree of

care responsibilities, which is divided into three distinct categories: the “delegated care” case corresponds to situations where the respondent delegates almost all caregiving responsibilities to their spouse. The category “shared care” depicts situations where care activities are equally shared between both partners and the category “primary caregiver” designates situations where the respondent has personal responsibility for the domestic and care arrangements of the household.

As shown in Figure 1, the first path into high-level employment represents situations where respondents immediately found a qualified job after receiving a Swiss degree. In this case, they received a work permit on the basis of the “essential employment” clause and did not have to mobilise any family reunification measures in order to remain in the country after their student permit expired<sup>10</sup>. This explains why the red and green arrows do not converge at any point. This direct route into qualified employment is associated with the delegation of most care responsibilities to a spouse.

The second path into employment represents situations where the transition between graduation from a Swiss HE institution and access to a qualified job was mediated by marriage to a Swiss or EU-citizen. In this case, despite having Swiss HE qualifications, respondents were dependant on family reunification measures for gaining access to the upper reaches of the Swiss labour market (all the arrows converge at a particular point). In this case, care is either shared equally between partners or is delegated to a spouse.

In contrast, a third and final ideal-type model represents those respondents for whom marriage to a Swiss or EU-national after graduation does not open up opportunities for access to the upper reaches of the labour market, but acts rather as a precondition to labour market exit or, at most, part-time and discontinuous labour market participation, combined with primary responsibility for domestic and care activities.

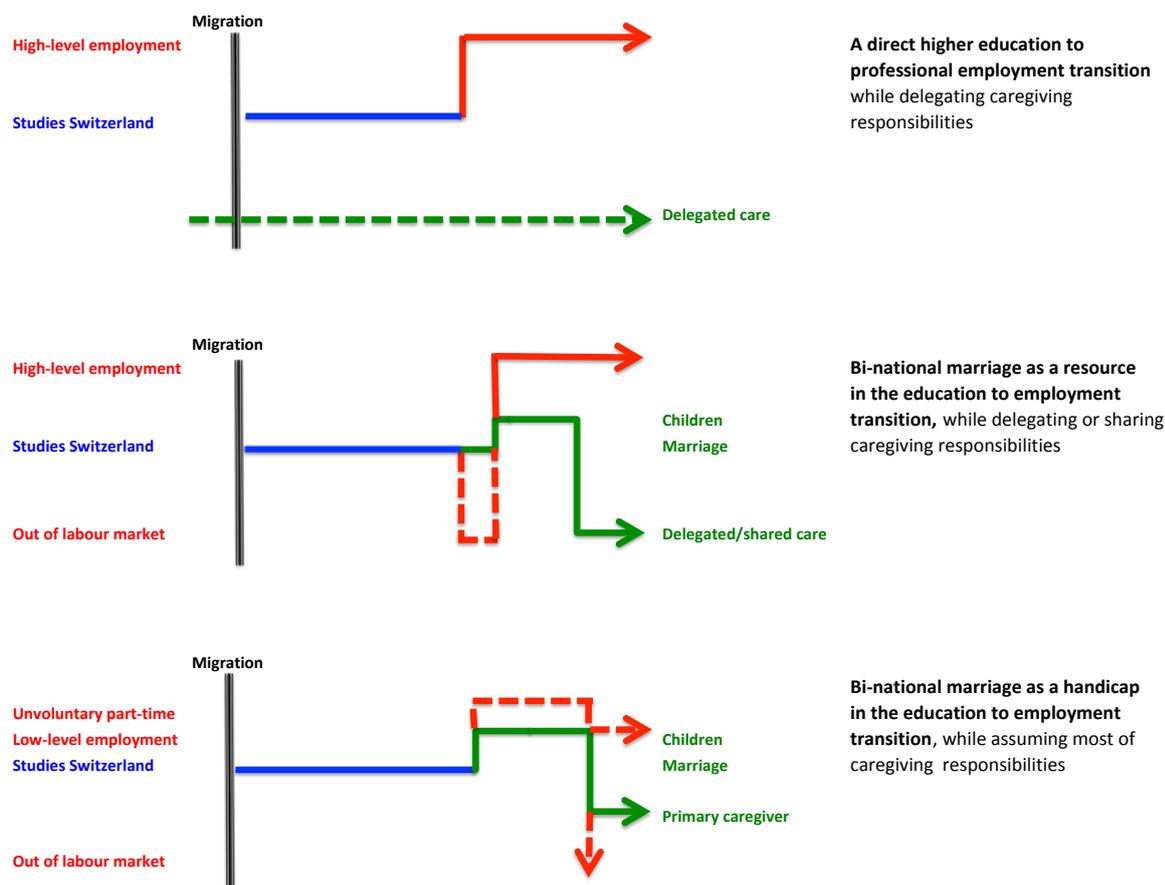


Figure 1. *Labour market outcomes for Peruvians with Swiss HE qualifications*

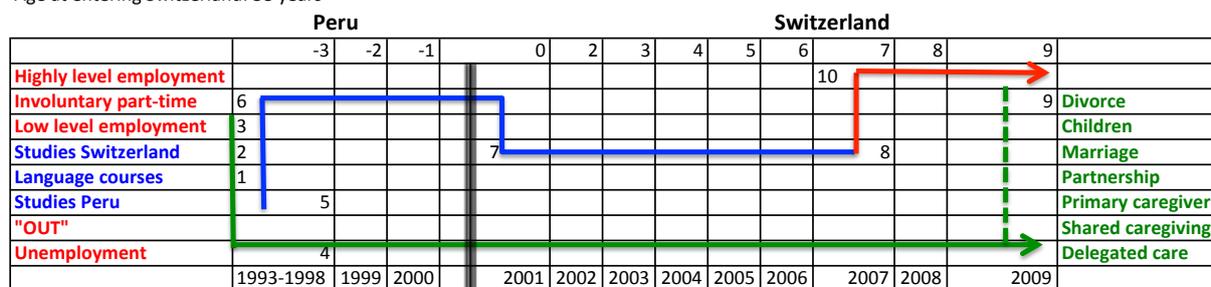
### 6.1 *A direct higher education to professional employment transition*

This path refers to Peruvian professionals that obtain a Swiss degree in the expected timeframe and entered qualified employment almost immediately after graduation. This pattern of transition is male-dominated. One example is Samuel who started training to be an architect in Peru before travelling to Europe during a “gap year” funded by his parents (see Figure 3). He decided to go to Germany and while he was there he met a Swiss woman, who was the daughter of his German language teacher (1). At the end of his stay, Samuel returned to Peru to finish his degree (5). His Swiss girlfriend joined him there; they married in Peru (2) and had two children (3). Whilst in Peru, his wife worked part-time as a German language teacher in a private school and looked after the children, with the help of her mother-in-law (4). After working as an independent architect for some years (6), Samuel was recommended by one of his former teachers for an 18-month scholarship to one of the Federal engineering

schools in Switzerland. His wife and kids moved back with him (7). After passing his Masters degree, he was awarded an additional grant to continue onto a PhD (8). At the end of his first three years at the engineering school, he made a successful “fast track” application for Swiss citizenship. Immediately after defending his doctorate, his wife asked for a divorce on the grounds that he was not spending enough time with his family (9) and she moved back to her home city with their children. Samuel has always worked full-time as an architect in the French-speaking part of Switzerland (10).

Education: Architect/Engineer

Age at entering Switzerland: 38 years



- 1: Swiss girlfriend
- 2: Marriage
- 3: Children

- 4: Delegates caregiving to wife
- 5: Bachelor in Architecture
- 6: independent architect

- 7: Master/PhD in engineering + scholarship
- 8: PhD diploma
- 09: Divorce
- 10: Employment as an architect

Figure 2. *Lifelines of Samuel*

### 6.1.1. Gendered configurations in the direct transition to professional employment

This ideal-type of transition to the labour market is associated with particular types of HE qualifications and depends on a normative gender division of labour. It is particularly visible amongst male engineering students, who are actively sought after by prospective employers, sometimes even before graduation. For example, Augusto was awarded the same Federal scholarship as Samuel and passed an MA degree in computer science. Even before he graduated, he was contacted by a “head-hunter” working for a global company looking for a software specialist to be based in Switzerland. The company provided Augusto with all the administrative paperwork required to obtain a work permit, whilst offering him a permanent employment contract. This smooth transition into high-level employment would seem to be restricted to very masculine fields of expertise.<sup>11</sup>

In this case, marriage to a Swiss national is of no consequence for the successful transition to professional or managerial jobs. However, the successful completion of an engineering degree and the subsequent career path of these migrant men are dependant on

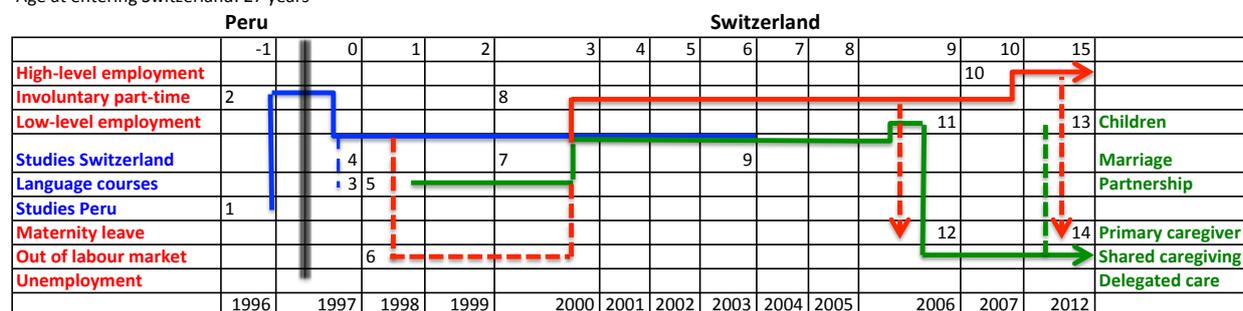
their ability to delegate domestic and care responsibilities: usually to their mothers in the home country setting and to their spouses in the host country context. Here, the decision to give priority to the male career is taken irrespective of the nationality of the spouses. It is based on an evaluation of the respective employment opportunities available to men and women in the Swiss context. Since the jobs available to women are usually less well paid than those open to men, the adoption of a “modified male breadwinner” family configuration appears all the more rational. This is consolidated by the long hours work culture that prevails in many male-dominated areas of the Swiss labour market (Le Feuvre, 2015, pp. 8-9).

### 6.2. Bi-national marriage as a resource in the education to employment transition

Marriage to a Swiss or EU citizen offers an alternative route to settlement in Switzerland for foreign graduates, although the positive labour market outcomes often take longer to achieve than those associated with the previous ideal-type transition. If a person is unable to immediately enter the Swiss labour market after graduation from a Swiss HE, marriage to a Swiss or EU national provides an alternative route to legal settlement and often allows the acquisition of additional skills in order to maximise employment opportunities in the Swiss labour market. For example, learning the regional language such as French or German, doing volunteer work in associations related to the professional domain or accepting less qualified jobs in order to be trained in specific skills are all strategies that depend on the prior acquisition of settlement rights. This second ideal-type transition can be illustrated by the case of Marta, a social work professor at a Swiss University of applied science (see Figure 3).

Education: Social worker

Age at entering Switzerland: 27 years



- 1: Bachelor in Social Work
- 2: Jobs as a social worker
- 3 + 4: Scholarship: PhD + lang. courses
- 5: German boyfriend
- 6: Volunteer work
- 7: Marriage
- 8: Part-time jobs in associations
- 9: PhD diploma
- 10: Full time professorship
- 11: 1st child
- 12: Maternity leave
- 13: 2nd child
- 14: Maternity leave

Figure 3. Lifelines of Marta

After earning her Bachelor degree (1), Marta worked for several NGOs involved in women's health issues in Peru (2). She won a Swiss Federal scholarship to do a PhD in social work, and was able to take some French language courses before the start of the course (3+4). During her PhD about migrants' health issues, she started to do volunteer work with local NGOs (6). Although she took more time than expected to finish her doctoral dissertation (9), one of the NGOs she had been volunteering for offered her a part-time research job (50%), which enabled her to fund the last months of her doctoral studies (8). However, she did not have much time left on her student permit and her future employer was not able to mobilise the "essential employment" clause. She solved this problem by marrying her German partner (7). The experience Marta gained in working for the NGO, along with the topic of her PhD dissertation, helped her get a fixed-term post-doc position at a University of applied science, where she was eventually recruited to a professorship and where she has been working ever since (10). On the birth of her first child (11), Marta was employed on two fixed-term, part-time (50%) research contracts and was entitled to 4 months statutory maternity leave (12). After the birth of her second child (13), she had a permanent position and was able to reduce her working time quite drastically (down to 1 day a week) for a year, but then increased progressively up to 80% of a full-time position once she had secured a place at the University crèche (14). She claims that her domestic arrangements are fairly egalitarian, notably because her husband takes on an equal share of the domestic and child-care activities. She believes that this is because her husband's own professional career, as an independent advisor to research labs, is less secure and well paid than her own.

#### *6.2.1. Gendered configurations in the bi-national marriage transition to employment*

In contrast to the previous case, this path does not seem to be tied to specific occupations and transition from the Swiss HE institution to the labour market depends heavily on the ability to enter into a bi-national marriage. Marriage to a Swiss or EU citizen provides the stability required to make the transition to employment over a longer period of time. Taking a "step back" in order to achieve the desired employment outcome is an important feature of this ideal-type model of transition. Accepting jobs that are clearly below the educational credentials of the respondents and/or periods of time spent in unpaid activities such as voluntary work are seen as strategic stepping-stones towards more stable and prestigious jobs. However, in order to adopt such strategies, the migrants need to be married to a Swiss

or EU citizen. Thus, Paco, a Peruvian lawyer who graduated with an MBA in Switzerland, explained how he had accepted a relatively poorly paid job in a small insurance company in order to enhance his knowledge of the Swiss insurance sector. He described this as his “tiger strategy”: “Have you seen a tiger? The tiger always takes a few steps back before jumping higher”. In Marta’s case, the combination of a part-time, fixed-term job in an NGO and post-doc position provided her with the specialist knowledge and personal contacts that would prove essential to her successful application for a professorship. Many of the cases that correspond to this ideal-type pattern of transition also include considerable investment – in terms of time and money – in language courses in order to enhance employment opportunities in particular parts of Switzerland, a multilingual country.

The stability provided by marriage to a Swiss or EU citizen thus proves to be vital for the successful completion of this rather more prolonged and tortuous path of transition from a Swiss HE institution to the labour market. Since the qualifications gained by the foreign respondents were not as clearly in demand as the engineering degrees that enabled a direct transition to the labour market, via the “essential employment” clause, a bi-national marriage enables the respondents to remain in the country long enough to consolidate their potential career opportunities, via a more meandering route.

The care configurations associated with this second transition were not systematically aligned to the “male breadwinner / female carer” gender regime. The fact that these respondents passed through various forms of precarious and unpredictable jobs led to more inventive solutions for the organisation of domestic and care arrangements. Although the more promising career opportunities that were generally available to men did lead to some delegation of care activities to their spouses, this was less systematic than in the previous case. When the employment opportunities of the female spouse were better than those of her partner, more egalitarian care arrangements were established, irrespective of the nationality or citizenship status of the spouses.

### *6.3. Bi-national marriage as a handicap in the education to employment transition*

While the previous patterns of transition eventually lead to stable positions in the upper reaches of the Swiss labour market, the third and final model reflects the risk of disqualification that some Peruvian graduates face. This is a female-dominated path, which is particularly associated with studies in SSH. Once again, marriage to a Swiss or EU citizen



found a short-term job in an NGO for migrants (10), before taking up a permanent position in a private bookshop and then in a public library (11). Feeling frustration at the lack of career opportunities in either of these positions, she successfully applied for a job as project manager in an international development agency (12). This was seen as a clear “improvement” in her career prospects, particularly as her employer encouraged her to enroll for a Master’s degree in intercultural communication (13). Unfortunately, just after she graduated from this course, she was made redundant under a downsizing exercise (14). After six months on unemployed benefit, she was extremely depressed and applied for a very short-term, part-time (30%) position in a public sector organisation (15). After re-training at her own expense (16-17), she now works part-time (under 50%) for a migrant integration office and as an independent coach and adult educator. In addition, she continues to do voluntary work for a number of NGOs, and to assume almost all the domestic and household duties.

### *6.3.1. Gendered temporalities shaping the impeded education to employment transition*

Contrary to the other paths, the professional trajectories of these Peruvian graduates are often involuntarily part-time and their employment status remains well below their qualification levels over long periods of time. Almost all the cases observed here concern graduates from the field of SSH, who experience stiffer competition for jobs overall (Gfeller & Weiss, 2015). The risk of deskilling is particularly high for those graduates who aspire to jobs in the academic or research sectors, where permanent jobs are in particularly short supply (Dubach, 2015). For example, Hilda earned a PhD in linguistics in Switzerland and started an academic career, but she never managed to obtain a tenured position, due to financial cutbacks in her field of specialisation.

The fact that the Peruvian partner’s career is considered secondary to that of their Swiss or EU spouse is once again based on an assessment of their respective employment opportunities; a process that often takes the form of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Since the Peruvian partner is considered to face a number of “objective” handicaps in the transition to the labour market (qualifications in a highly competitive field, poor language skills in relation to the place of residence, etc.), the partners’ career takes precedence and the domestic division of labour is progressively consolidated according to a “male breadwinner / female carer” model. Once the Peruvian partner has “opted out” of the labour market in this way, it is extremely difficult to renegotiate a more egalitarian share of domestic duties and care

responsibilities, even when the couple remains childless, as in the case of Lola. The arrival of children tends to reinforce this family model, particularly given the scarcity and extremely high cost of childcare services in Switzerland (Baghdadi, 2010; Giraud & Lucas, 2009). For example, Jenny and Rosa both obtained social science degrees from a Swiss HE institution and married their respective Swiss boyfriends in order to stay in the host country, with a view to starting a family. However, neither of them managed to find a job in their field of qualification and they both accumulated a series of short-term, part-time jobs that were manifestly below their level of qualification (one in secretarial work, the other as a teacher in a private language school). Neither has ever succeeded in working more than 50%. Due to this fragile employment profile, both ended up taking the lions' share of care responsibilities at home and soon felt overwhelmed by the time-consuming character of their daily family lives. Although marriage to a Swiss national provided them with a form of residential and financial stability, it also led them to renounce their own professional ambitions and, ultimately, to lose the potential value of their Swiss qualifications.

## **7. Conclusions**

To date, few studies have compared the employment outcomes of migrants who have graduated from a Swiss HE institution, or have considered the influence of legal restrictions on the residential rights of foreigners after graduation on their transition to employment. However, in this article, we have attempted to show that individuals with similar objective characteristics – Peruvian origin and a Swiss HE qualification – can end up in very different positions on the Swiss labour market. It would appear that “essential employment” criteria are harder to access than family reunification measures for most of the non-EU graduates who want to remain in the host country.

Due to the interdependence of family and professional trajectories, these foreign graduates fare very differently in the game of “snakes and ladders”<sup>12</sup>. Due to their rarity and desirability for Swiss employers, (male) engineering graduates experience a linear, rapid and upwardly mobile transition to the upper reaches of the labour market, irrespective of their marital or family status. They do not need to negotiate any extension to the time officially allocated to the transition period. However, not all foreign graduates are able to negotiate this transition within the duration of their student visa. In this sense, the field of study does have a significant influence on subsequent transitions to employment and on family care

arrangements. In order to undertake additional training or to accumulate the required work experience, a second group of graduates are dependant on family reunification measures to ensure their successful transition to jobs that are commensurate with their (Swiss) qualifications. To a certain extent, bi-national marriage provides the “ladder” to desired jobs that their qualifications alone do not guarantee (at least, not within the limited student visa extension period). However, according to the gender division of domestic labour and care configurations that are adopted within these bi-national couples, family reunification measures can also represent a potential source of professional precariousness and disqualification for a number of (female) migrants. Unable to mobilise the “essential employment” clause on the basis of their HE qualifications, these women often find themselves at risk of sliding down the socio-professional hierarchy. The more unequal the organisation of domestic and care work within their households, the less likely are they to benefit from the stability and extended time-scale provided by family reunification measures to consolidate their transition to the upper reaches of the Swiss labour market.

In identifying three potential patterns of transition from Swiss HE institutions to the labour market, we are able to better understand the conditions under which these highly qualified migrants accumulate advantage and disadvantages across time (Schafer, Shippee, & Ferraro, 2009). According to their field of study, legal status and family configurations, not all Peruvian migrants men and women are able to respond to the opportunities and challenges of the post-educational transition to the labour market in the same way. The gender ratio in engineering and SSH and the employment outcomes of graduates from each of these both fields of study are obviously different. However, comparison with Swiss graduates shows the long-lasting effect of nationality on transition patterns to the Swiss labour market. One year after graduation, Swiss SSH graduates show higher rates of unemployment and underemployment than engineering graduates. However, this gap is totally closed five years after graduation (Gfeller & Weiss, 2015).

Previous research has brought attention to the pervasive effects of the Swiss gender regime for highly skilled migrants – without Swiss qualifications - from EU countries with less traditional family models (Riano, Limacher, Aschwanden, Hirsig, & Wastl-Walter, 2015). Recognising the combined influence of gender and migration regimes on the ability of qualified migrants to capitalise on their educational credentials opens up interesting avenues

for further research on the complex interactions between education, employment and family formation patterns.

## 8. Notes

<sup>1</sup> The classification of migrants used in Swiss Law is based on country of origin. Under this distinction, it is usually much easier for EU citizens to study, work and settle legally in Switzerland than it is for citizens from any other part of the world.

<sup>2</sup> As Riaño and Baghdadi have stressed: “The term foreigner (living in Switzerland either temporarily or long-term but not having Swiss citizenship), rather than immigrant (foreign-born) is used in Swiss legislation and statistics. This reflects a legal conception of citizenship based on the principle of descent rather than on place of birth” (2007: p. 164). Due to this conception, as direct descendants of at least one Swiss parent, grandparent or more distant parent, some Peruvian migrants actually have Swiss citizenship before moving to the country.

<sup>3</sup> In many cases, foreign students are admitted to enrol on the condition that they pass a number of additional courses in advance of formal registration to the degree programme they want to follow. Once these “prerequisite” credits have been obtained, they follow the courses under the same conditions as Swiss and EU students.

<sup>4</sup> Some of our interviewees mentioned having to overcome passive or active resistance to their visa application procedures on the part of Embassy administrative staff.

<sup>5</sup> Some Peruvians are not counted in Swiss statistics because they have dual nationality from Switzerland or other European countries. Likewise, Peruvians under the age of 18 are not counted as voters. Of course, undocumented Peruvians are not identified in the official statistics either.

<sup>6</sup> For workers, there is also a fixed-term “L” permit that is valid for less than twelve months. In 2016, there were 4,000 L permits and 2,500 B permits issued (The Federal Council, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> A life-calendar is defined as « a two-way grid, with the temporal dimension on the one side, and different life domains on the other. Respondents are asked to report events for each life domain, relating them to what happened across other domains or in references to time landmarks. While filling in this calendar, respondents can visualize their life trajectory, linking what happened to when, where and for how long it happened » (Morselli, et al., 2013, p. 3).

<sup>8</sup> Two interviewees (1 man + 1 woman) had graduated from a University of Applied Sciences; nine (2 men + 7 women) had studied at a University and five (all men) had graduated from one of the Federal Engineering Schools.

<sup>9</sup> Nine (3 men + 6 women) had a Swiss spouse, one woman had a European union spouse and 2 men had a Peruvian spouse. Four interviewees (3 men + 1 woman) were single with no children at the time of the interview.

<sup>10</sup> It is nevertheless important to note that some of these respondents had been able to come to study in Switzerland in the first place due to family connections in the country, which entitled them to a family reunification permit prior to commencing their studies.

<sup>11</sup> Although not all male engineers experience this direct form of transition from Swiss HE institutions into professional employment.

<sup>12</sup> *Snakes and ladders* is a children's chequered board game, where the aim is to move from the square at the bottom right-hand corner of the board to the one at the top left-hand corner, at the throw of a dice. The journey is dotted with the presence of ladders, that enable players to move up the board more quickly and by snakes, that send them sliding down again.

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